

**The divine substance as *māsūra* and *muftaraqa*.
An attempt of reinterpretation of the Trinitarian
terminology in the light of the teaching of Abū
Rā'īṭa's *al-Risāla fī l-thālūth al-muqaddas***

[La divina substancia como *māsūra* y *muftaraqa*. Un intento de reinterpretación de la terminología trinitaria de acuerdo con la enseñanza de *al-Risāla fī l-thālūth al-muqaddas* de Abū Rā'īṭa]

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Resumen: Este artículo trata de la terminología trinitaria de Abū Rā'īṭa contenida en su *al-Risāla fī l-thālūth al-muqaddas*. Concretamente, se centra en una expresión que simboliza la unidad de la sustancia divina y la multiplicidad de hipóstasis, es decir “*māsūra* y *muftaraqa*”. Ofrecemos un intento de reinterpretación del significado de estos términos clave de acuerdo con la comprensión de la doctrina trinitaria de Abū Rā'īṭa.

Abstract: The paper deals with Abū Rā'īṭa's Trinitarian terminology found in his *al-Risāla fī l-thālūth al-muqaddas*. In particular, it concentrates on an expression that epitomises the unity of the divine substance and multiplicity of hypostases, i.e. “*māsūra* and *muftaraqa*”. In the light of the Abū Rā'īṭa's understanding of the the Trinitarian doctrine, an attempt of reinterpretation of the meaning of these key-terms is presented.

Palabras clave: Abū Rā'īṭa. Santísima Trinidad. Analogías. Terminología trinitaria.

Key words: Abū Rā'īṭa. Holy Trinity. Analogies. Trinitarian terminology.



Introduction

The Jacobite Abū Rā'īṭa (+ after 830AD) is considered the first Arab Christian theologian to have presented the comprehensive description of the doctrine on the Trinity and *Al-risāla fī l-thālūth al-muqaddas* (*On the Holy Trinity*) is probably his most important work.¹ Like the other Arab Christian texts, the pressing reason to write *Al-risāla fī l-thālūth al-muqaddas*, as a matter of overriding importance, was to clarify the teachings of the “People of the South” (اهل التيمين), and to illustrate the doctrine of the “People of the Truth” (اهل الحق) -i.e. the Jacobites-, as well as to explain the obscure aspects the teachings of the peoples (اقاويل ام), presumably the Muslims.² Works like that of Abū Rā'īṭa were mainly addressed to Christian congregations in their internal problems to preserve their own communities from conversion to Islam and, in that same context, to expose Christian doctrine and defend the faith against the accusations of polytheism.³ However, along with these external reasons that led the author

¹ Georg GRAF, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Habīb ibn Hidma Abū Rā'īṭa*. Edited and translated by G. Graf, col. «CSCO» 130 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1951), pp. 1-26; Sandra Toenies KEATING, *Defending the 'people of truth' in the early Islamic period. The Christian apologies of Abū Rā'īṭah*. Edited and translated by S. T. Keating (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), pp. 164-215.

² Cf. Abū Rā'īṭa, *Al-risāla fī l-thālūth al-muqaddas*, in KEATING, *Defending*, p. 164.

³ Selected apologetical works: *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid*, in Margaret Dunlop GIBSON (ed.), *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles from an Eighth or Ninth Century Ms. in the Convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai: with a Treatise on the Triune Nature of God, with translation from the same codex*, col. «Studia Sinaitica» 7 (London: C. J. Clay and Son, 1889); THEODORE ABŪ QURRA, *Maymar yuḥaqqiqu annahu lā yulzamu l-Naṣārā an yaqūlū thalātha āliha idh yaqūlūna l-Āb ilāh wa-l-Ibn ilāh wa-Rūḥ al-Qudus (ilāh) wa-anna l-Āb wa-l-Ibn wa-Rūḥ al-Qudus ilāh wa-law kāna kull wāḥid minhum tāmm 'alā ḥidatihi*, in Constantin BACHA (ed.), *Mayāmir Thāwudūrus Abī Qurrah Usqf Harrān* (Beirut: Maṭba'at al-fawā'id, 1904), pp. 23-47; THEODORE ABŪ QURRA, *Maymar fī wujūd al-Khāliq wa-l-dīn al-qawīm*, in Louis CHEIKHO (ed.), “«Maymar li-Tāurus Abī Qurra fī wujūd al-khāliq wa-l-dīn al-qawīm»”, *Mashriq* 15 (1912), pp. 757-774, pp. 842-852; TIMOTHY, *Al-muḥāwarah al-dīniyya allatī jarat bayna l-khalīfat al-Maḥdī wa- Ṭimāthāwus al-jāthliq*,

to compose his writings, there is also other important information behind the text. Here, we will attempt to get insight into his Trinitarian theology in the context of its proper terminology. Consequently, this paper will focus neither on the list of the divine attributes nor on their provenience, since this has already been studied.⁴

in Robert CASPAR (ed.), “Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le Catholicos Timothée I et le Calife Al-Mahd’î (IIe/IIIe siècle) «Mohammed a suivi la voie des prophètes»,” *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977), pp. 107–175; IBRĀHĪM AL-ṬABARĀNĪ, *Mujādalah al-rāhib al-qiddīs Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī ma’a l-amīr ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Hāshimī*, in Giacinto Bulūs MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue d’Abraham de Tibériade avec ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Hāsimī à Jérusalem vers 820: étude, édition critique et traduction annotée d’un texte théologique chrétien de la littérature arabe* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, 1986); EUTYCHIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, in Pierre CACHIA (ed.), col. «Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium» 192 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1960); YAḤYĀ IBN ‘ADĪ, *Maqālah yatabayyanu fihā ghalaṭ Abī Yūsuf ibn Ya ‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī fī l-Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, in Augustin PÉRIER (ed.), “Un traité de Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, défense du dogme de la Trinité contre les objections d’al-Kindī”, *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 22 (1920-1921), pp. 3–21; IBN AL-ṬAYYIB, *Maqālah fī l-tathlīth*, in Gérard TROUPEAU (ed.), “Le traité sur l’unité et la trinité de ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ṭayyib”, *Parole de l’Orient* 2 (1971), pp. 71–89; Adel Theodore KHOURY, *Apologétique Byzantine contre l’Islam (VIIIe-XIIIe s.)* (Altenberge: Verlag für Christlich-Islamisches Schriftum, 1982), pp. 13-14; Richard BULLIET, *Conversion to Islam in the medieval period: an essay in quantitative history* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 131; Philip JENKINS, *The Lost History of Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), p. 111; Arthur Stanley TRITTON, *Muslim Theology* (London: Luzac & Co., 1947), p. 89. Bibliography of Arab Christian literature and Christian - Muslim relations: Georg GRAF, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944-1953), V vol.; Samir Khalil SAMIR, “Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien : Auteurs arabes chrétiens (XIe-XIIe siècles)”, *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976), pp. 201-249; Samir Khalil SAMIR, “Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien: Addenda et corrigenda aux auteurs arabes chrétiens des XIe et XIIe s.”, *Islamochristiana* 5 (1979), pp. 299-317; David THOMAS, Barbara ROGGEMA (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), vol. I; David THOMAS, Alex MALLETT (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010-2011), vols. II & III.

⁴ Sandra Toenies KEATING, “An Early List of the Ṣifāt Allāh in Abū Rā’īta al-Takrītī’s “First Risāla ‘On the Holy Trinity””, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 36 (2009), pp. 339-355.

Sandra Toenies Keating in her unpublished doctorate analyzed Abū Rāi'ṭa's writings and theology from almost every possible angle.⁵ However, an attentive reader would notice that this particular Trinitarian treatise (*Thālūth*) presents something more than a mere description of the Trinitarian dogma supported by a passing analogical references. For this reason I wish to focus my attention on a particular expression that is found in Abū Rāi'ṭa's treatise on the Trinity, i.e. *continuous and divided*.⁶ With respect to these two terms I propose to examine them under the following aspects: 1) *continuity* - "homogeneity and process"; and 2) *division* "which does not divide". At the end of the paper some remarks concerning the understanding of that terminology will be given.

Since this two-fold way of speaking about God, in terms of *continuity and division*, was not created by Arabic speaking theologians, but it has its roots in the 4th century Trinitarian debate, the following section will deal briefly with the Cappadocian contribution to this issue.

1. The Cappadocian Fathers

The discourse on the understanding of the divine unity and the trinity of the hypostaseis is a key-issue in the theological legacy of the Cappadocian Fathers. The Cappadocian distinction between hypostasis and substance is fundamental to their teaching on the continuity and distinction of the divine Being. Gregory of Nyssa places the Christian doctrine of God accurately between the Jewish monotheism and Greek polytheism, when he draws the

⁵ Sandra Toenies KEATING, *Dialog between Muslims and Christians in the Early Ninth Century: The Example of Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'īṭah al-Takrītī's Theology of the Trinity* (The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., 2001). See also: Salim DACCACHE, "Polemique logique et élaboration théologique chez Abū Rā'īṭah al-Takrītī", *Annales de Philosophie* 6 (1985), pp. 33-88; Sara Leila HUSSEINI, *Early Christian Explanations of the Trinity in Arabic in the Context of Muslim Theology* (University of Birmingham: Birmingham, 2011).

⁶ The terms in italics are borrowed from S. Toenies KEATING translation.

conclusion about the character of Christian doctrine, which is rooted in the Jewish conception of the unity of nature and the Hellenistic distinction of the persons.⁷ This principle was established most notably in his *De differentia essentiae et hypostaseos* (commonly known as Basil's *Letter 38*), written to clarify the Trinitarian teaching. In this work, we find an interesting passage that deals with the concept and its terminology.⁸ In the second paragraph of *De differentia*, Gregory deals with the proper understanding of the nouns (ὀνομάτων), which are predicated of plural and numerically various subjects. These general nouns are used to indicate a common nature (κοινὴν φύσιν) of things and are not confined to any particular element of the set. These individual elements, which are described by the identical definition of their essence or substance, are of the same common essence or substance (ὁμοούσιοι).⁹ Further, in *Ad Ablabium quod non sint tres dei* (*On 'Not Three Gods'*), we read that the oneness of nature, which is designated by a singular predicative noun, is an absolutely indivisible unit (καὶ ἀδιάτμητος ἀκριβῶς μονὰς), not capable of increase by addition or of diminution by subtraction, but in its essence being one and continually remaining one, inseparable even though it appear in plurality, continuous (συνεχῆς), complete (ὀλόκληρος), and not divided (οὐ συνδιαίρομένη) with the individuals who participate in it.¹⁰

Between the three divine Persons there is a certain indissoluble and continuous communion (συνεχὴ καὶ ἀδιάσπαστον κοινωνίαν). This guarantees that there is nothing inserted between the hypostaseis, nor is there anything else beyond the nature that separate it from itself. Gregory

⁷ Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Oratio Catechetica Magna*, III, PG 45, 17D.

⁸ On the authorship of this work consult: Tomasz GRODECKI, "Autor i data powstania *O rozróżnieniu między istotą a hipostazą* (tzw. *Listu 38 św. Bazylego Wielkiego*)", *Vox Patrum* 17 (1997), pp. 121-131.

⁹ Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *De differentia essentiae et hypostaseos* 2, PG 32, 325B-328A.

¹⁰ Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Ad Ablabium quod non sint tres dei*, PG 45, 120B. English text after: Philip SCHAFF, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), vol. V, p. 332.

also refutes the existence of any “vacuum of interval, void of subsistence, which can make a break in the mutual harmony of the divine essence and solve the continuity (συνεχὲς) by the interjection of emptiness”.¹¹

This emphasis on the indivisible, continuous state of the divine substance is followed by the parallel exposition concerning the distinction of the hypostaseis. To introduce the problem of hypostasis, Gregory speaks about the separation of certain circumscribed conceptions from the general idea. It is said that the particular elements of a set are characterized by the differentiating properties (ιδιάζοντα τρέψη) that serve to distinguish one from another.¹² The distinctively apprehended hypostaseis are in mutual distinction (κεχωρισμένον τῶν ὑποστάσεων).¹³ They are multiple but distinct from the others by the name, which belongs to each as its own and signifies the particular subject. Moreover, the three hypostaseis share in the common nature. Gregory explains that this distinction among the hypostaseis is caused by the particular attributes considered in each severally and, when they combined, is presented to us by means of number. These two characteristics of the Triune God are united in one inseparable junction through their operation (ἐνέργεια). No hypostasis, though individual and subsisting in the common nature, acts separately. None of them does anything that is not also being done by the two others. Every divine operation *ad extra* has its origin in the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is perfected and fulfilled in the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Trinity accomplishes each of its operation not by means of separate action according with the number of the hypostaseis, but in one motion and disposition, communicated from the Father and fulfilled in the Spirit.¹⁴ Unity and trinity are expressed not only conjunctively but also conversely to emphasize their mutual inseparability and how they work

¹¹ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *De differentia* 4, PG 32, 332B. English text after: Philip SCHAFF, *Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), vol. VIII, p. 139.

¹² Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *De differentia* 2, PG 32, 328A.

¹³ Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *De differentia* 4, PG 32, 332A.

¹⁴ Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *De differentia* 4, PG 32, 332A; GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Ad Ablabium*, PG 45, 125C-127B.

simultaneously. This is made clear in the following passage of *De differentia essentiae et hypostaseos*:

But the communion (κοινωνία) and the distinction (διάκρισις)¹⁵ apprehended in Them are, in a certain sense, ineffable and inconceivable, the continuity (συνεχὲς) of nature being never rent asunder by the distinction of the hypostaseis (τῶν ὑποστάσεων διαφορᾶς),¹⁶ nor the notes of proper distinction confounded in the community of essence. Marvel not then at my speaking of the same thing as being both conjoined and parted (συνημμένον καὶ διακεκριμένον), and thinking as it were darkly in a riddle, of a certain new and strange conjoined distinction (διάκρισιν τε συνημμένην) and distinct conjunction (διακεκριμένην συνάφειαν).¹⁷

This quotation sums up and confirms what was said above, namely that the parallel and, somehow, opposing properties of the divine Being as such, are intrinsically “convergent” and “coexisting”. Gregory of Nazianzus turns the expression on the continuity (conjunction) and distinction into another one, which deals explicitly with the “numeric” character of God, i.e. oneness and threeness, and conversely, threeness and oneness.¹⁸ An important re-

¹⁵ The term is rendered in English either by *separation* or *distinction*. In the Patristic sources it is used to distinguish the hypostaseis in Godhead. Cf. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa* I, 7, PG 94, 808A.

¹⁶ In the field of Trinitarian theology the use of the term διαφορά is not allowed in reference to the divine substance, but it is commonly accepted with respect to the hypostaseis; “Κατὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ θεότης μία· δηλονότι κατὰ τὸν τῆς οὐσίας λόγον τῆς ἐκότητος νοουμένης, ὥστε ἀριθμῷ μὲν τῆς διαφορᾶν ὑπάρχειν, καὶ ταῖς ιδιότησι ταῖς χαρακτηριζούσαις ἑκάτερον· ἐν δὲ τῷ λόγῳ τῆς θεότητος τὴν ἐνότητα θεωρεῖσθαι.” BASIL THE GREAT, *Contra Eunomium* I, 19, PG 29, 556B; cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Contra Eunomium* VII, PG 45, 757B; GREGORY OF NYSSA, *De differentia* 5, PG 32, 336B.

¹⁷ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *De differentia* 4, in PG 32, 332D-333A. English text: cf. SCHAFF, *Fathers*, vol. VIII, 139; GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Epistula XXXV*, 4n, in Anna M. SILVAS, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters. Introduction, Translation and Commentary*. Edited and translated by A.M. Silvas, *Supplements to «Vigiliae Christianae»* 83 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 255.

¹⁸ “Ἐκ μονάδος Τριάς ἐστὶ, καὶ ἐκ Τριάδος μονὰς αὐθις.” GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS,

mark with respect to the proper understanding of the terminology is also made. Gregory maintains that the divine hypostaseis are, in fact, divided without division and united in division (διαίρεῖται γὰρ ἀδιαίρετως, συνάπτεται διηρημένως).¹⁹ The Godhead (θεότης)²⁰ is one in three and the three are one, while the proper understanding of this relation consists in not making the unity a confusion, nor the distinction a separation (οὔτε τὴν ἔνωσιν σύγχυσιν ἐργαζόμενοι, οὔτε τὴν διαίρεσιν, ἀλλοτριώσιν).²¹ To continue this thinking, the Three are neither so separated from one another as to be divided in nature, nor so contracted as to be circumscribed by a single person.²²

2. The Unity of God

The theological significance of the divine unity is the starting point of Abū Rā'īṭa's study and exploration of the Trinity. In Christian theology the definition of the divine "unity" is always posited as God being one in the multiplicity of His hypostaseis, and this approach was already known to have its origin in Patristic times. To explain this, the Church Fathers applied the Aristotelean philosophical understanding of unity to their theological investigation.²³ Although the Trinitarian theology knows different

Carmina dogmatica I, PG 37, 413A.

¹⁹ The term διαίρεσις has a twofold meaning: disallowed in the Trinity, in the sense of *division*, and accepted in that of *distinction* by orthodoxy. Cf. ATHENAGORAS, *Legatio pro Christianis* 10, PG 6, 909B; GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Oratio* XXXIX, 11, PG 36, 345D, 348A.

²⁰ A term derived from the Greek θέα (beholding). Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Ad Ablabium*, PG 45, 120D-121A.

²¹ Cf. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Oratio* XXXIX, 11, PG 36, 345D, 348A.

²² Cf. GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Oratio* XXXIV, 8, PG 36, 219A; GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Oratio* XXXI (*Theologica Quinta*), 14, PG 36, 119A.

²³ Aristotle distinguished five types of unity: 1) Unity by accident (κατὰ συμβεβηκός); accidents which inhere in a subject may be called one together with the subject in which they inhere; 2) Unity by continuity (κατὰ συνεχῆ): any number of objects may be considered one if combined to form a single collection; 3) Unity of substratum (κατὰ

models of unity, like: unity of substratum, unity by genus, and unity in species (definition),²⁴ the Jacobite author was inclined to choose the latter of these, the model of unity in species.²⁵ This model, as taught by Aristotle, unites the individuals that fall under one definition and are centered around a kind of a certain similarity (ὁμοιότης), such as, all water being the same everywhere, for it bears a kind of certain similarity. In this case the similarity is all the greater if water comes from the same source (κρήνης).²⁶ This statement is an important note we will refer and return to later in this paper.

The unity in species is also discussed in the context of the unity in number, it is supported by an Alexandria-originated numerical theological “proof” concerning belief in the Trinity.²⁷ This refers to the two groups of

ὑποκείμενον): any number of substances are called one if they have a common underlying element; 4) Unity by genus (κατὰ γένος): an example is found between horse, human, and dog which all are animals; and 5) Unity in species (εἶδος), or in definition (λόγος): two individuals of the same species are one, because either they have one definition, or they belong to the same species. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* VI, 1015b, 16-35; 1016a, 1-17; 1016a, 17-24; 1016a, 24-32, 1016b, 31-32.

²⁴ Cf. Harry Austryn WOLFSON, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 315.

²⁵ Cf. ABŪ RĀ'ĪTA, *Thālūth*, pp. 172-174. On the further explanation of that choice read: Sandra Toenies KEATING, *Dialog between Muslims and Christians in the Early Ninth Century: The Example of Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'ītah al-Takrītī's Theology of the Trinity* (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 2001) (unpublished doctoral dissertation), pp. 382-385.

²⁶ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Topics* I, 7, 103a, 19-23.

²⁷ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *De coelo* 268a. Philo maintained the number “three” to be a reflection of fullness and perfection, for it contains beginning, centre and the end. The Alexandrian tradition considered the number “three” to be perfect and holy from the theological perspective. According to their exegesis the number “three” was the symbol of divinity referred to *sacrum*, meanwhile its biblical use was always identified with the Trinity. Cf. PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *Quaestiones in Genesim* II, 5. Translated by Ch. Mercier. Edited by Roger ARNALDEZ, Claude MONDESERT, Jean POUILLOUX, «Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie» 34-A (Paris: Cerf, 1979); PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, III, 3. Translated by Ch. Mercier. Edited by Roger ARNALDEZ, Claude MONDESERT, Jean POUILLOUX, «Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie» 34-B (Paris: Cerf, 1984); PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *Quaestiones in Exodum* II, 100. Translated by F. Petit.

numbers, odd and even, when the perfect unity of species that belong to the set of numbers is enclosed in a number that contains both, odd and even numbers. Hence, this is the case of the number “three”, which encloses both odd and even. This numerical distinction found in God is then followed by another argument on the divine attributes that provides a crossing point between two theological reflections on the nature of God discussed in the treatise.²⁸ However, it is worth noting, that Abū Rāi’ṭa did not focus his attention and explanations merely on the problem of the divine attributes, but rather he was intent on further reflection. He turns the language of attributes into a language of three categories that describe the inner life of Trinitarian relations. This issue requires further scrutiny and exploration.

Referring to the divine hypostaseis Abū Rāi’ṭa claims that the divine attributes are “a perfect thing from something perfect”, and analyzes the problem in three different aspects. The “morphology” of the substance is classified in the following categories, as: a) *divided and dissimilar* (مفترقة متباينة). It is said, that in this case God is limited and isolated, having no *continuity* (لا اتصال); b) *continuous and connected* (متصلة مأسورة), having no *dissimilarity* (لا تباين); and c) *connected and divided* (مأسورة مفترقة) at the same time (جميعاً معاً).²⁹ Each of these solutions to the problem consequently has different theological repercussions. If we take into consideration the model that sees the divine attributes as *divided and dissimilar*, the result is a polytheist model of separated gods. They differ and have no *continuity* that seems to constitute their equality and communion. The solution proposed

Edited by Roger ARNALDEZ, Claude MONDESERT, Jean POUILLOUX, «Les oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie» 33 (Paris: Cerf, 1978); CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata* VII, 40, 4, in SC 428, pp. 142-145. More about the sybolism of the number “three” read in Mariusz SZRAM, *Duchowy sens liczb w alegorycznej egzegezie aleksandryjskiej (II-V w.)* (Lublin: RW KUL, 2001), pp. 209-217.

²⁸ For more about Abū Rāi’ṭa’s doctrine on the divine attributes, read: Keating, “An Early List”, pp. 339-355.

²⁹ This oxymoronic expression is also used by Timothy I in his dialogue with al-Mahdi (“والثلاثة متصلة بانفصال منفصلة باتصال...”). Cf. ABŪ RĀ’ĪṬA, *Thālūth*, 182; TIMOTHY, *Al-muḥāwarah*, pp. 130-131.

by number two sees the attributes as contrary to the solution number one. The attributes here are said to be *continuous and connected*, the thing that guarantees their cooperation, leads to their unification and, consequently, makes their distinction and dissimilarity impossible. Therefore, in the light of orthodox Christian theology these two models must be rejected. The third model deals with a simultaneous *connection and division* in the divine substance, and once accepted, it is further developed.

3. Continuity - “homogeneity and process”

The concept of *continuity* calls to mind a sense of unity and “homogeneity” of the divine substance (جوهر). This factor is not to be understood either as a “linear,” “spacial” *continuity*, or as an Aristotelian unity by continuity (κατὰ συνέχειν). In the analogies presented in the *Thālūth*, Abū Rāi’ṭa makes an effort to visualize the complexity of the Trinitarian doctrine. Although he does not provide any definition of the term “substance” *sensu stricto*, nonetheless one can find some attempts to describe the very divine substance in his works. In his *Fī ithbāt* one reads that the singularity of the substance is seen as being one in (واحد في): eternity (الازلية), knowledge (العلم), power (القوة), honor (المجد), majesty (العظمة), as well as being one in substantial attributes other than these (وغير ذلك من الصفات الجوهرية). In general, Abū Rāi’ṭa understands a substance of a thing and its quiddity (ماهية) as something that embraces every component participating in that thing, and which is unchanging.³⁰ The divine substance is said to be perfect (كاملا), unmixed (لم يختلط به), simple (بسيط), without density (غير كثيف), spiritual (روحاني), and incorporeal (غير جسماني).³¹ Speaking about the *continuity* of this substance, Abū Rāi’ṭa refutes any kind of its plurality (اكثر).³² It is also said, that God

³⁰ Cf. ABŪ RĀ’ĪṬA, *Risāla fī ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa ithbāt al-thālūth al-muqaddas*, in KEATING, *Defending*, pp. 106, 108.

³¹ Cf. ABŪ RĀ’ĪṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 176; BASIL THE GREAT, *Epistola* 8, PG 32, 248C.

³² Cf. ABŪ RĀ’ĪṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, p. 112; BASIL THE GREAT, *Epistola* 38, 2, PG 32, 325BC.

is in agreement (المتفق) in all His affairs, harmonious (المتسق) in all His states (حالات), immaterial in His substance (ولطف جوهره), without difference in His power (قوته), will (مشيئته) and operations (أفعاله).³³ Such a description of the divine substance calls for great scrutiny of the author's idea of *continuity*, that he gives to describe the inner-Trinitarian life.

The teaching on the Trinity is given by means of analogy, which was a common pedagogical method used in Christian theological debate at the time. In support of the arguments that he presented, three analogies are here described. These analogies, although limited, seem to transmit the author's major ideas concerning his understanding of the inner-Trinitarian life. It is worth noting that Abū Rāi'ṭa acknowledges the limits that any argument *per analogiam* proposes. They may describe the very same things and relations, but in fact each of them highlights another aspect of the Trinitarian reality.

The first example that is presented is the analogy of the three lamps, which is also used by other Arab Christian writers.³⁴ Abū Rāi'ṭa uses this analogy in both of his treatises, the *Fī ithbāt* and the *Thālūth*. It is used in reply to the following question: is the manner of God's unity (اتفاق) different from the manner of His *division* (افتراق)? The "homogeneity" of the substance, as shown in this example, is demonstrated by the union of light (واحد فلا تفاقها جميعاً في الضوية). The three lamps are one, with respect to the light they emit, although it is said that they constitute three "sources", one for each flame.³⁵ Abū Rāi'ṭa reasonably states that in the case of God, one must not speak about three sources but about one cause (علة) of the two other hypostaseis.³⁶ Thus the "cause" becomes the center of the analogy of the three lamps. According to the definition of the unity in species, the similarity of the elements (species) is dependent on their source, namely, the cause. Consequently, this static "homogeneity", "sameness" of the

³³ ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 190.

³⁴ Cf. ABŪ QURRA, *Maymar yuḥaqqiqu*, p. 36.

³⁵ ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, pp. 106; ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 186.

³⁶ Cf. ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 184.

divine substance appears to be based on the monarchical concept of God. The *continuity* of God, in this point, shifts from its seemingly “static” or “spatial” notion (substantial oneness of light) to its dynamic understanding as a “causative process”, which is characterized as being “without beginning and without time” (بلا بدى ولا زمان). This is an important statement because it alludes to the character of the relation between the two hypostaseis and their cause (علة). Abū Rāi’ṭa confirms that this relation is substantial and natural (إضافة جوهريّة طباعية),³⁷ and cannot be treated only from an individual dimension or perspective. The substantial and natural character of that relation assumes that it is a common determinant of the hypostaseis and their activity.

The concept of *continuity* is further developed by the analogy of Adam, Abel and Eve. The analogy is present in the theological legacy both from the Church Fathers and the Arab Christian writers.³⁸ The author proposes the analogy as a way of finding an answer on the question concerning the nature of their intransitive (unchanging) proper characteristics. The relation and similarity between Adam, Abel and Eve is said to be “something perfect from something perfect”. The perfection that describes each of them attests to their *continuity* (i.e. “sameness”) of substance that Eve and Abel share with Adam.³⁹ Their “homogeneity” is made evident by an unbroken substantial relation (إضافة جوهريّة) that bounds Eve, Abel and Adam, and is conveyed by their common humanity (الإنسانية واحد).⁴⁰ Furthermore, Abel and Eve are species whose unity is founded on a one, single cause. This idea of unifying monarchy is clearly elaborated here. Also the shift from the “static” (or exclusively “substantial”) understanding of the *continuity* to its dynamic dimension is in this case even more perceptible than in the previous analogy. The Jacobite author presents his view, with a detailed

³⁷ Cf. ABŪ RĀ’ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 186.

³⁸ ABŪ QURRA, *Maymar yuḥaqqiqu*, p. 36; ABŪ QURRA, *Maymar fī wujūd*, p. 224; ABŪ RĀ’ṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, p. 114; ABŪ RĀ’ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 188.

³⁹ Cf. ABŪ RĀ’ṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, p. 114; ABŪ RĀ’ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 186.

⁴⁰ Cf. ABŪ RĀ’ṬA, *Thālūth*, pp. 184-186.

and explicit statement, naming the particular relations that characterize the divine hypostaseis. The inner-Trinitarian relations are reflected by the proper characteristics (خاصة) ascribed to each person of the analogy: Adam is the begetter and not the begotten (والد لا ولد), Abel is the begotten and not the begetter (ولد لا والد) and Eve is the one who proceeds from Adam, neither begetter nor begotten (خارجة من ادم لا والد ولا ولد).⁴¹ Unlike Adam, Abel and Eve, the divine hypostaseis are not limited either by time or by place. They are not divided either in power, will or in operation. The process of begetting and procession is atemporal. On the one hand, it is completed, but, on the other, it is eternally ongoing. Singularity is interchangeable with plurality, and the *continuity* is interconnected with *division*. The example of the Biblical triad of Adam, Abel and Eve emphasizes the role of common cause in the process of procession of the hypostaseis. This common source is not only the cornerstone of their communion but it is, moreover, the principle and guarantee of their distinction.

The third analogy that was given to reflect the inner-Trinitarian life is that of the Sun.⁴² This is probably the most popular metaphor used by the Church Fathers and Arab Christians in their Trinitarian works.⁴³ In the *Thālūth* the analogy appears in a section concerning the temporal relation between the *continuity and division* of the divine substance. Using the image of the Sun (الشمس) and its two properties, i.e. its light (ضوء) and its

⁴¹ Cf. ABŪ RĀʾĪṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 188.

⁴² Cf. ABŪ RĀʾĪṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, p. 112; ABŪ RĀʾĪṬA, *Thālūth*, pp. 192-194.

⁴³ Cf. TEOGNOSTUS, *Hypotyposeon*, in PG 10, 240A; ATHANAIUS, *In illud, omnia mihi tradita sunt*, in PG 25, 216AB; ATHANAIUS, *Orationes contra Arianos* II, 41, in PG 26, 236A; ATHANASIUS, *Orationes contra Arianos* III, 4, in PG 26, 329A; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Sermo 31*, in PG 36, 162B; GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Contra Eunomium* 8, in PG 45, 773B; JACOB OF SERUGH, “Homélies contre les juifs”, in PO 38 (1976), p. 51, p. 53; ANASTASIUS, *Explicatio fidei orthodoxae*, in PG 89, 1404C; JEROME OF JERUSALEM, *Dialogus de S. Trinitate inter Iudaeum et Christianum*, in PG 40, 852C; JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa* I, 8, in PG 94, 833A; *Fī tathlūth*, p. 76; cf. TIMOTHY, *Al-muḥāwarah*, p. 129; ABŪ QURRA, *Maymar yuḥaqqiqu*, pp. 40-41; AL-ṬABARĀNĪ, *Mujādalāh*, p. 371; EUTYCHIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, pp. 33-34, n. 47.

heat (حرارة), the author intends to show the simultaneous nature of *continuity and division*; the Sun disc with its light and its heat. In the same way the divine Being may be characterized by a simultaneous *continuity and division*. The two substantial solar attributes, its light and its heat, proceed from their source, i.e. the solar itself. Their generation takes place within the disc and both, while dwelling in it, are also emitted by it. The generation of light and heat, their mutual indwelling, eternal and prior to time (ازلياً بازليته قديماً بقدمه), may show not only the *continuity* and consubstantiality of the hypostaseis, but also attest the unity that is realized by their mutual indwelling, their reciprocal perichoresis.⁴⁴ Their dwelling in one another is not only a static mode of being, but as in the image of the Sun, its light and its heat are continually emitted, so by parallel argument, the Father, who is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, is the principle of their mutual and continuous coinherence. This coinherence, in turn, supposes the existence of distinct subjects.

4. Division “which does not divide”

The aspect of *continuity* presented previously, is inseparably bound to its complement, i.e. the notion of *division*. The *division* of the divine hypostaseis cannot be achieved by the existence of something “absolute”, for that would lead to a form of tritheism. The only way to distinguish the hypostaseis and to keep the unity of the substance inviolate is to distinguish them by means of relations.

The relational character of the hypostaseis is also presented by means of analogy in the work of our author. Now we will examine how the *division* is explained and what arguments are used to show its inseparable link with the *continuity*.

The well-known analogy of the three lamps, already presented in this

⁴⁴ Cf. Jn 10:30.38, 14:9–10.20, 17:21; cf. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa* I, 8, in PG 94, 829A.

study, shows both the unity of the lights and their multiplicity. The *division* of the lights is said to consist in their self-subsistence (قائم بعينه) and endurance in their being (ثابت بذاته). It is a proper characteristic that constitutes an identity of a being that does not pass away. Each of the lights is an individual, unchangeable being. He maintains also that each light is defined by its proper state of being (قوام ذاته).⁴⁵ Besides the numeric identity of the flames, no further details are provided on the nature of their *division*. Although the text does make use of the Trinitarian terminology, the proper state of being is not defined, and consequently the analogy does not explain fully what is meant.

Manifestly more helpful guidelines are provided by the analogy of Adam, Abel and Eve. As in the case of the lights, the *division* of persons is expressed by the unchanging character of their properties (خاصة). A certain distinctiveness of the analogy of Adam, Abel and Eve is that the text gives explicit names of these properties. Abū Rāi'ṭa lists here three properties that distinguish the persons from one another: the begetter (والد), the begotten (ولد), and the one who proceeds (خارجة).⁴⁶ It is also said that the property of the first person is not the begotten (لا ولد).⁴⁷ This property is also extended to the third person to make it distinct from the second. The different ways of procession ascribed to Abel and Eve reflect the difference in procession of the divine persons. Eve's procession is said to be "*ad extra*, external" (خارجة) to Adam, though she is "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh".⁴⁸ In consequence, one cannot speak about Eve's parental generation and she cannot be called Adam's daughter. The parental relation

⁴⁵ Cf. ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 184.

⁴⁶ In the context of the divine hypostaseis Abū Rāi'ṭa uses here the following terms: fatherhood (أبوة), sonship (بنوة), procession (الإيمتاق, خروج). Cf. ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, p. 114; ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 188.

⁴⁷ The property of the Father is thus his unbegottenness (لا هو منها). ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, p. 114.

⁴⁸ Cf. Gen. 2:23.

is noted in the case of Abel, who is said to be begotten.⁴⁹ This explanation reflects the theological insight into the inner-Trinitarian life. The relations are things that really exist in the divine Being, and do not differ from the divine substance. In consequence, the one substance which is said to be *continuous*, is equal to the three hypostaseis, whose distinction is based on the properties that are identical with the *continuous* substance. The names of the relations found in the analogy of Adam, Abel and Eve testify to the relational character of the persons, and signify their relational mode of being. Aristotle, in his teaching about the category of relation, says that the correlative beings come into existence simultaneously.⁵⁰ Since the second (the Son) and third hypostasis (the Spirit) are related to the first hypostasis (the Father), as their cause,⁵¹ they are co-eternal. With respect of the temporal dimension of these two features of the undivided substance, Abū Rāi'ṭa maintains that the *continuity* of the substance is not antecedent to the *division* of the hypostaseis. The *continuity and division* are related, interchangeable, inseparable and reciprocally indwelling notions that describe the divine Being.

The last analogy to be analyzed is that of the Sun. The Sun and its three existent inseparable components (individuals) (ذات ثلاثة اشخاص)⁵² is a reasonable object to picture the problem the simultaneity of *continuity and division*. The analogy discerns three distinct properties (خواص): the Sun (visible solar disc, القرص), the heat (الحرارة) and the light (النور). The solar attributes are said to be unceasing (لم يزل), continuously generated (لم يزل والد), existing atemporally (بلا زمان) and simultaneous (شايق لوجود احدهما قبل غيره). The heat proceeds (منبثقة) from the Sun, but is carried by the light (في النور), which

⁴⁹ An interesting account on this analogy wrote Theodor of Mopsuestia. THEODOR OF MOPSUESTIA, *Controverse avec les Macédoniens*, in PO 9 (1913), pp. 656-658.

⁵⁰ Also noted by Abū Rāi'ṭa (من غير تقديم ولا تاخير). Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Categories* 7, 7b15; ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, p. 114.

⁵¹ The author clearly states that the relationship of the Son, the Spirit to the Father has a continuous, unceasing character. This results from the fact that the Father is in eternal causative (علة ازلية) relation to the Son and the Spirit. ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, p. 114.

⁵² Cf. ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, p. 112.

is generated (المولود) eternally. The *division* of these elements is based on the “differentiation of specific existence” (امتياز الوجود الخاص لكل واحد) that belongs to each one.⁵³ The property of each element of the triad is unchanging, the solar disc is neither the light nor the heat, and the light is not the heat. The analogy of the Sun is limited and does make clear what the common substance of the three components is. Hence, their nature remains undefined. The Sun is the light and the heat, but it cannot be said that light and heat are the Sun. From the perspective of a contemporary reader, we might say, that the common principle for these three components of the analogy is radiation, which in the Sun assumes the form of a wide electromagnetic spectrum while, in the case of a visible light and sensible heat, it is only a section of this spectrum.⁵⁴

As demonstrated in the three analogies, the concept of *continuity* is related to that of *division* of the divine hypostaseis. This inseparable bond shapes also the character of the *division*. This Trinitarian theological language must be precise, not only with respect to the terms that describe the common and particular categories of being but, first of all, it should be unambiguous with regard to such a sensitive and crucial issue as the relations. Therefore, in the context of what was said so far, the term *division* must not be used in the theological description of the Trinitarian life. Speaking about the *division* of the divine substance, or *division* between the three divine hypostaseis, introduces *separation* that leads to false conclusions and supports erroneous doctrine. Therefore in the next section we will examine theological vocabulary that Abū Rāiʿta uses when talking about the concepts of *continuity* and *division*.

⁵³ Cf. ABŪ RĀʾĪṬA, *Fī ithbāt*, p. 112.

⁵⁴ To picture this, it is worth noting that the solar electromagnetic spectrum extends from the radio waves (300 GHz - 3 Hz) to the Gamma rays (more than 30 EHz), while the heat corresponds to the infrared radiation (430 THz - 300 GHz) and the light to the visible light frequencies (790 THz - 430 THz).

5. Terminology

The proper understanding of theological concepts relies on the non-ambiguity of their terminology, especially in the field of Trinitarian theology. In respect to this issue, Latin theology is explicit in the terms it uses to describe the status of the hypostaseis. Each hypostaseis is said to be distinct (*distinctio*) from the other, never divided (*divisio*) nor separated (*separatio*).⁵⁵ In case of Greek Trinitarian theological patrimony, the situation is not as clear. A reader who wants to know the Greek terms used to characterize the reciprocal status of hypostaseis has to be very careful. G.W.H. Lampe, renowned for his lexicon of Patristic Greek, lists two following terms used by the Church Fathers to render the meaning of *distinctio*: διαίρεσις (but as *division* denied within Trinity);⁵⁶ and διάκρισις (meaning also: *separation, division*).⁵⁷ This terminological principle is explicitly articulated by John of Damascus in his *De fide orthodoxa*.⁵⁸

Abū Rāi'ṭa's Trinitarian study is replete with terminology that is already developed and in use by the other Arabic speaking theologians at the time. Such terms as: substance, nature, being, hypostasis, individual, property, attribute, subsistence, generation, procession and so on, are found in almost every Trinitarian treatise of the time.⁵⁹ This changes when we take into

⁵⁵ Cf. TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Praxeam* 12, in: PL 2, 168AB; AMBROSE, *I De fide*, 2 in: PL 16, 532BC; THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 31, a. 2. On the use of Trinitarian terminology in English read: George Leonard PRESTIGE, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: S.P.C.K., 1952); Christopher A. BEELEY, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Gilles EMERY, *The Trinity. An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

⁵⁶ Cf. G.W.H. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1961), pp. 348-349.

⁵⁷ Cf. LAMPE, *Lexicon*, p. 354.

⁵⁸ Cf. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa* I, 14, in PG 94, 860B; JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa* III, 5 in PG 94, 1000B; JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa* IV, 18 in PG 94, 1181B.

⁵⁹ For more details on the Arabic Trinitarian vocabulary read: Rachid HADDAD, *La Trinité*

consideration terms that appear occasionally. Abū Rāi'ṭa's exposition of the doctrine on the Trinity uses some terms that are correlated with the plurality of the hypostaseis and their mutual relations.

The Trinitarian treatises of the Arabic speaking theologians, written between the 9th and the 10th century, make relevant remarks about Trinitarian language. In these texts we find some expressions that deal with the inner-Trinitarian relations, and provide foundations for further development of the proper understanding of Trinitarian dogma as well as its terminology. For instance, Timothy I (+ 823AD) refutes any separation between the hypostaseis (لم تفترق منها)⁶⁰ and difference (انفصال) between God, His Word and His Spirit.⁶¹ To render the idea of multiplicity of the hypostaseis and the relations between them, he uses the *m-y-z* derivate words (e.g. مميّزة, تميّز).⁶² An Arab-Orthodox Buṭrus al-Bayt Ra's (Pseudo-Eutychius, 877-940 AD) describing the relation between the divine hypostaseis, explicitly denies their mutual separation (ليس بمفترق منه).⁶³ The hypostaseis are distinct without separation (ميّز بينها بلا فرقة) and conjoined without intermingling.⁶⁴ Besides his rejection of "separation", he speaks about the "distinction" not only by way of proper characteristic (خاصة) but also by use of the *m-y-z* derivate terms.⁶⁵ A similar remark concerning the terminology is found in Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī's *Mujādalāh al-rāhib al-qiddīs Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī ma'a l-amīr 'Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Hāshimī*. Discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, he notices that just as both heat and light come from the Sun without separation, in the same way God, His Spirit and His Word

divine chez les théologiens arabes (750-1050) (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985).

⁶⁰ TIMOTHY, *Al-muḥāwarah*, 131.

⁶¹ TIMOTHY, *Al-muḥāwarah*, 129.

⁶² TIMOTHY, *Al-muḥāwarat al-dīniyya allātī jarat bayna l-khalīfa l-Mahdī wa Ṭīmāthāwus al-jāthliq*, in: Clint HACKENBURG, *An Arabic-to-English Translation of the Religious Debate between the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I and the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Mahdī* (The Ohio State University, 2009), pp. 61-62.

⁶³ Cf. EUTYCHIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, no. 31, p. 24, no. 32, p. 24.

⁶⁴ "فكل واحد بخاصته التي هي له دون الآخر غير الآخر، ولكنهم إله واحد ليس يفرق بينهم شيء". EUTYCHIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, no. 36, p. 28.

⁶⁵ Cf. EUTYCHIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, no. 44, p. 32.

are without division and separation (بلا تفریق ولا فصل).⁶⁶ God's Word and Spirit play a revealing role in our knowledge of God. Ibrāhīm sees their separation from God as destructive for the deity as such, and at the same time he underlines the oneness and undivided character of the divine substance.⁶⁷

In the previous section we dealt with the description of God proposed by the Jacobite theologian. However, I decided to follow the expressions used in the English edition of the treatise for the following reasons. First, to avoid the ambiguity that would rise after the use of more than a one term with respect to the "multiplicity"; second, to focus our attention on the importance of proper terminology in general; third, to signal the need of a deeper study of the context the key-terms that are used. For this purpose we notice that in speaking about hypostaseis, Abū Rāi'ṭa uses three different words derived from the three roots: *f-r-q*, *b-y-n* and *m-y-z*. The terms based on two roots: *f-r-q* and *b-y-n* are used quite frequently (the *f-r-q* rooted words occur 29 times, the *b-y-n* rooted words occur 10 times), while the *m-y-z* derivatives occur only 3 times. We may group the terms in respect of the context in which they are used.

a) Relation between the divine attributes

In most of the cases, the proper Trinitarian terminology is used in the description of the relations between the divine attributes and the divine substance,⁶⁸ but there are also a few passages that deal with the relation

⁶⁶ Cf. IBRĀHĪM AL-ṬABARĀNĪ, *Mujādalāh*, pp. 369-371.

⁶⁷ The expression "لكن له ابتداء وانتهاء" probably refers to Q 21:22. Cf. AL-ṬABARĀNĪ, *Mujādalāh*, p. 369.

⁶⁸ This is so in the following texts: on a rejection of the erroneous and a choice of the correct hypostasis-substance model (#16), the equality of God's substance and His hypostaseis (#18), the substance-hypostaseis simultaneity (#17, #24). Cf. ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 183-191, 200.

between the components of the analogies.⁶⁹

Below, the use of the *f-r-q* and the *b-y-n* derivate terms, in their explicit reference to God or His attributes, will be presented.

The first occurrence describes possible models of reciprocal relations between the divine attributes:

And if this is the case, then it is necessary that [the attributes of life, knowledge and wisdom] be described either as *divided* (مفترقة) and *dissimilar* (متباينة) having no continuity, or as continuous and connected, having no *dissimilarity* (لا تباين), or as *connected* (ماسورة) and *divided* (مفترقة) simultaneously. If they say that they are *divided* (مفترقة) without being continuous, then they are describing God as limited, because it is not possible that part of a single thing is *divided* (مفارق) and *separated* (مباين) from the other part, unless it is outside of its *ousia*, so that the two parts are isolated from each other.⁷⁰

Abū Rāi'ṭa's teaching on the nature of the relation between the divine substance and the divine attributes is important for a proper understanding of the terms he uses in the field of the Trinitarian theology. God is said not to be subject to any fragmentation, and His attributes are said to be originated from His substance.⁷¹ He is simple (بسيط), without density (غير كثيف), spiritual (روحاني), and incorporeal (غير جسماني).⁷² The three models of a possible substance-attribute configuration presented by the author, should be re-read in the context of his teaching on the divine Being. Since Abū Rāi'ṭa considers the divine attributes as the substantial ones, originated from God's very substance (من جوهره), certain requirements must be met, so that the principle of God simplicity remain inviolate. The first two models

⁶⁹ Here, we may point out the following passages: relation between the soul, intellect and the faculty of speech (#25), the Sun, its light and its heat (#26-27), and the five bodily senses (#26). Cf. ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, pp. 193-195.

⁷⁰ ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 183.

⁷¹ Cf. ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 182.

⁷² Cf. ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 176.

do not suit Christian doctrine on God. The expressions used suggest that they are pairs of synonymous characteristics, rather than contrastive, antonymous juxtapositions. The divine attributes are said to be both ماسورة and مفترقة. The term ماسورة renders and idea of *continuity*, “homogeneity”, or “simplicity” of the divine substance. This should determine the understanding of the مفترقة meaning that reflects the idea of multiplicity in God. Abū Rāi’ṭa defends the orthodoxy of the Christian faith’s position and his chosen terminology does not weaken the argument. Therefore, it seems that the latter term (مفترقة) should not negate the former. If one were to understand the مفترقة (and all the *f-r-q* derivate terms) as a *division*, one would introduce a fragmentation, a fraction, an atomization into the one divine substance. This would seem to be opposed to Abū Rāi’ṭa’s idea or intention.⁷³ The meaning that would perhaps better correspond to his theology is “difference”;⁷⁴ then God’s substance would be described as *connected and different*. The nature of this difference has been well elaborated by the author. But it would not be proper to speak about the divine hypostaseis as “different”, although we may accept that they are marked by a “difference,” which makes them distinct. This so-called “difference” in them, is their way of procession. In fact, in the Trinity we distinguish two different processions: the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. This difference further leads to another distinction in God, namely the properties: the fatherhood and the unbegotteness, the sonship and the procession (as presented by the analogy of Adam, Abel and Eve).

⁷³ It is worth noting Lane’s indication that, in addition to “distinction”, the word may also represent the “union” or “connection” that strengthens even more its “unifying” dimension. Cf. Edward William LANE, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1893), Book I, Part 1, p. 286.

⁷⁴ Cf. Albert DE BIBERSTEIN KAZIMIRSKI, *Dictionnaire arabe-français contenant toutes les racines de la langue arabe, leurs dérivés tant dans l’idiome vulgaire que dans l’idiome littéral, ainsi que les dialectes d’Alger et de Maroc* (Paris: Maissonneuve et CIE Éditeurs, 1860), vol. II, p. 533; Edward William LANE, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 6, pp. 2383-2384.

In addition to what has been said so far, the cited passage contains another term that needs to be revised. Usually the dictionaries translate the *b-y-n* derivate nouns in a variety of ways, and they are often rendered in English by such words as: “dissimilarity” or “separation”. However, the context in which Abū Rāī’ṭa uses them is specific. In accordance with the meaning of the *f-r-q* derivates, also the *b-y-n* derivates reflect the multiplicity in God in such a way that it does not harm His simplicity. A significant fragment that deals with the inner-Trinitarian relation reads:

Now, does *continuity* precede *division* (افتراق) in the senses of the body, or does *division* (افتراق) anticipate continuity? For if the soul and the body and the senses are creatures, created things [which are] continuous and *divided* (مفارقة) simultaneously without continuity anticipating *division* (افتراق), and *division* (وافترافها) [preceding] continuity, then [this] is established as fact as we have described [it, namely] that God, may He be praised! is three hypostaseis bound through the coincidence of their ousia, and *separated* (متباينة) through the state of existence of the being (الحال قوام ذات) of each one of them, without their *continuity* preceding *division* (افتراق) and *division* (وافتراق) [preceding] *continuity*.⁷⁵

The text in English interprets the *ism al-fā’il* متباينة, referred to the divine hypostaseis, by *separated*. However, as stated above, the idea of separation is not proper in speaking about the divine hypostaseis. Furthermore, the hypostaseis are said to be متباينة through the state of their being (الحال قوام ذات). The state of being, known in Greek theology as the τρόπος ὑπάρξεως, is a property that constitutes a mode of divine Being. Therefore, the حال قوام should be understood as a mode of subsistence of the essence (ذات) in each hypostasis. The state of being does not break either the unity of the substance or the inter-communicability of the hypostaseis, but it is rather the cause of their identity and individuality. Thus, the hypostaseis are said to be “distinct” and never *separated*. For that reason this text helps us to

⁷⁵ ABŪ RĀ’ITĀ, *Thālūth*, p. 195.

understand the nuances of Abū Rāi'ṭa terminology.

The third term that is found in the following passage describes the divine hypostaseis:

For they are coincident, distinguished (متميزة), and different (مختلفة): coincident in their quiddity and their existence, and distinguished (و متميزة) because of a distinguishing (لميزة) characteristic of the substantial being (قوام ذات) of each one of them, just as we have explained before in this passage. And [they] are different (و مختلفة) because of the difference (لاختلاف) in property (خاصة) of each one of them, although their *ousia* is not different because of the difference of their properties. [...] For Adam is the begetter and not the begotten, and Abel is begotten and not the begetter, and Eve is the one who proceeds, neither the begetter nor the begotten: [they have] different (مختلفة) properties belonging to distinguished (متميزة) hypostaseis, [and] coincident *ousia*.⁷⁶

Abū Rāi'ṭa is also familiar with the *m-y-z* derivate terms. In the quoted passage, he maintains that the hypostaseis are *distinguished* (متميزة) by the characteristic of each one's substantial being (قوام ذات). This characteristic is further rendered by a term خاصة, a proper characteristic. Since it is the same factor as in the previous text that makes the hypostaseis different (i.e. قوام ذات), the relation between them should be described also by the same term, here: "distinction". It means that in this particular context the *b-y-n* and *m-y-z* derivate terms are synonymous.

b) Relations in analogies

The Trinitarian analogies belong to the second group of texts where Abū Rāi'ṭa follows his theological terminology. The terms are not referred directly to the divine reality, but concern the components of the analogies. We

⁷⁶ ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 200.

may count among these passages the analogies where the *f-r-q* and the *b-y-n* derivate terms are found. In these cases they characterize the relation between such things like: the Sun, its light and its heat;⁷⁷ the soul, the intellect and the faculty of speech;⁷⁸ and the five bodily senses.⁷⁹ It is worth noting the analogy of the soul, the intellect and the faculty of speech, in which an interesting use of the مباحنة term appears.

Are they continuous or are they *divided* (مفترقة), or do they have both attributes, I mean continuity and division (افتراقاً)? Was the soul ever *separate* (مباحنة) from the intellect and the faculty of speech, or one of these two from the others, then joined [together] later? Or is it not the case that their continuity and *division* (وتباينها) [occurred] together from their very beginning, [so that] one of them did not precede the other? Now, the thing is [in fact] as our description [explains] the continuity of the soul with its faculty of speech, and their *division* (وافتراقها).⁸⁰

In this passage, Abū Rāi'ṭa poses a question: “Was the soul ever مباحنة from the intellect and the faculty of speech, or one of these two from the others, then joined [together] later?” This question highlights two points. First, although the analogy is an imperfect way of demonstrating things, its psychological model refers to the mutual indwelling and unity of the soul, the intellect and the faculty of speech, reflecting the Trinitarian perychosis. Second, since the elements of the analogy were never anterior nor posterior to each other, their existence is parallel, simultaneous and atemporal. In consequence, they were never *separated* (مباحنة). Here, Abū Rāi'ṭa seems to be using the word مباحنة in the sense of “separation” to point out what kind of relations are not to be ascribed to the divine hypostaseis.⁸¹

⁷⁷ ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 193.

⁷⁸ ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 193.

⁷⁹ ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 193.

⁸⁰ ABŪ RĀ'ṬA, *Thālūth*, p. 193.

⁸¹ A similar context of use of that term is found in the analogy on the Sun. Cf. ABŪ

Moreover, in the same passage there is another place where the *b-y-n* derivate term is used: “Or is it not the case that their *continuity* and *division* (وتباينها) [occurred] together from their very beginning, [so that] one of them did not precede the other?” This statement is an explicit expression of an inseparable bound between the “one” and “many”. Its particularity is based on their “uninterrupted” coexistence. Continuity is not broken by multiplicity and multiplicity by continuity. Therefore, in contrary to the previous use of that word, one cannot speak here about *separation* but rather about “distinction”.

Conclusions

Abū Rāi’ṭa’s demonstration of the Trinity in a form presented in the *Thālūth* is a study that, probably for the first time, appears in this form in Arab Christian works at the time. Its distinctive feature is the way it deals with the Trinitarian dogma. Abū Rāi’ṭa follows an interesting, vivid method of exposition, which, founded on the doctrine of the divine attributes, explains Christian perspective—one could almost say—pictorially.

How is it achieved? Our knowledge on God is realised through a combination of the two aspects (that which is common and proper, or continuous and distinct). The expression that epitomises the unity of the divine substance and multiplicity of hypostaseis is that of “continuity and difference”. It is repeated many times across the work, and it creates a deep impression on the reader’s mind. The three analogies that were used in this paper also played an important role in the understanding of Abū Rāi’ṭa’s work. These analogies that are used, are not just mere examples, but were used in the process of developing and understanding of “continuity and difference”. The chosen analogies are not randomly picked but allow for a reflection on the inner-Trinitarian life from their true perspective, showing the reciprocal dependence of the “continuity and difference”. Such a

fruitful exploration allows us to depart from conceiving the divine unity as a monolith, and at the same time, allows for an explicit negation of the strict numeral form of monotheism. The elaboration of the issue of “distinction” by means of the analogy of Adam, Abel, Eve introduces the reader to the reality of the inner-Trinitarian relations. Furthermore, it also highlights that the divine hypostaseis not only proceed from the common, one cause—in reference to the unity of species—and attests to their substantial equality and individual identity, but it also suggests that they (hypostaseis) are turned to one another. Such a communion of Persons finds its climax in their reciprocal indwelling, as pictured by the analogy of the Sun.

Speaking about the multiplicity of the hypostaseis along with their inalienable substantial unity and perfect similarity, leads inevitably to the development of terminology. As we can see in the *Thālūth* the Arabic abounds in the variety of words that may be used in to express the plurality of hypostaseis. However, because of this profusion, the terminology referring to multiplicity has to be read carefully. Unlike the other authors, Abū Rāiʿta may be accused of lacking clarity in the terminology he uses. Therefore, as it was shown, each root-derivate term should be, so to speak, deciphered in the very context of its use. The Trinitarian analogies applied to the exposition of the dogma are helpful to grasp the Abū Rāiʿta’s teaching. As presented above, they do not only serve to illustrate Abū Rāiʿta’s understanding of the the Trinitarian doctrine, but they help to get the right understanding of his terminology.

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